This action plan requires you to focus on how you can better manage your personal work environment and your lifestyle, as discussed in pages 156-163 of the textbook.

The paper is requires to be 400-600 words

Use 3 of the following headings to identify and discuss areas you want to improve on in terms of your stress:

Planning; Time management; Overload avoidance; Social support; and Balance between work and leisure

For each area:

     o Describe what the problem or weakness is. Provide more detail than "I am a workaholic" or "I am weak in my time management" – use specifics and give examples.

     o How/why it contributes to your stress.

     o Practical, realistic steps that you will take to reach your goal.

responses to those events. Hence, hardy people use transformational coping to manage stress and frustration in productive, healthy ways.

Although some relationships and events are legitimately stressful due to their threatening nature, other stressors may be unrealistically interpreted as threatening and therefore cause one to experience unnecessary distress. Individuals who engage in transformational coping are more likely to interpret stressors as challenges rather than threats and to perceive themselves as able to control stressful situations. Taking an exam, for example, is stressful for many people. A student engaged in transformational coping might approach the exam by interpreting the test as an opportunity to show his or her knowledge, thus exerting control through preparation and study. The benefits from adopting a transformational coping perspective were accurately identified in the title of R. Carlson's (1997) best-selling book, *Don't Sweat the Small Stuff*.

SELECTIVE IGNORING

Selective ignoring is a variation of psychological withdrawal, a process by which a person looks for the positive aspects of a troublesome situation and anchors his or her attention to these, to the exclusion of the noxious aspects of the situation (Pearlin & Schooler, 1978). This process is facilitated by magnifying the importance of the positive aspects and viewing that which is noxious as trivial.

Selective ignoring may be counterproductive to transformational coping if used too frequently, too pervasively, or for extended periods of time. Further, although the feeling of control is central to the process of transformation coping, there are limits to a person's capacity for control. An old prayer petitions that when things are amiss, "Give me the strength to change what I can, the patience to accept what I cannot change, and the wisdom to know the difference." In any organization there are circumstances, persons, and events that one may not be able to alter. Learning to accept that which is inevitable helps avert some of the stress and distress one might otherwise feel. However, accepting too much as inevitable risks greater distress in the future if one develops a sense of helplessness or impotency in the organization (Seligman, 1975). Active passivity is different from learned helplessness.

Managing the Personal Work Environment

At any level in an organization, there are aspects of the daily work routine that are in the individual's control and there are aspects that are totally out of the individual's control. Managers and supervisors are

sometimes surprised to discover that they can control their working life to a greater extent than they had thought.

Several techniques are available to managers, supervisors, and employees for reducing work stressors by better management of their personal work environment. Obviously, some techniques are more applicable at certain levels in the organization than at others. Similarly, some techniques are more applicable in certain types of organizations than in others. As with the techniques for managing personal-response patterns, the techniques for managing the work environment are reported largely on the basis of the experience of management consultants and the other individuals who have described the techniques.

PLANNING AND TIME MANAGEMENT

Planning and time management are central skills for managing the stress of one's personal work environment (Whetton & Cameron, 2011). Good planning and time management go together for someone who is a good "macro time manager," which may be contrasted with the distressed "crisis time manager" (Brooks & Mullins, 1989). Macro time managers live with a sense of purpose and know the activities that contribute the most to their long-term life development. Therefore, a macro time manager begins by setting life goals and works to achieve these goals through a systematic process of (a) prioritizing the goals, (b) planning goal attainment through scheduling and delegation, and (c) praising oneself for small and notable achievements along the way (Brooks & Mullins, 1989; Weick, 1984).

In the work setting, personal planning involves looking into the future, identifying goals and possible job stressors, and developing a strategy to achieve goals while avoiding the negative impact of anticipated stressors. The process of personal planning parallels that of organizational planning. In a study of healthy executives, planning was one of the key preventive stress-management strategies used (J. C. Quick, Nelson, & Quick, 1990). Planning allows executives to minimize or eliminate surprises and focus their energies, thereby helping them manage stress.

One of the central issues in the planning process is time management. Deadlines, productivity objectives, and project timetables bring the manager and employee face to face with time and in doing so create significant distress. *Time management* represents a set of skills and attitudes that can be highly effective in reducing time stress and improving effectiveness. Increased job satisfaction and peace of mind are important consequences of wise time management. Davis, Eshelman, and McKay (2008) identified symptoms of poor time management, such as rushing, constantly missed deadlines, insufficient time for rest or personal relationships, and the sense of being overwhelmed by demands and details.

> Planning and time management are central skills to focusing, directing, and managing one's energy and stress in constructive, productive, and healthy ways.

Alan Lakein (1973) was a pioneer in time management who outlined a systematic approach to the effective use of time. Three concepts that are fundamental to his method are (a) the goals statement, (b) the to-do list with priorities, and (c) a schedule. One study of 353 employees in a variety of jobs found that some time management behaviors may have beneficial effects on job tension, stress, and satisfaction while apparently not having a beneficial effect on job performance as evaluated by their supervisors (Macan, 1994).

One major reason for poor time use is the lack of a clear sense of purpose. For the individual it is necessary to consider carefully what he or she wants out of life, to formulate a lifetime goals statement, to review it regularly, and to revise it periodically (Lakein, 1973, suggested revising the list each birthday). A major stumbling block to effective time use in organizations is lack of awareness or agreement about the duties, authority, and responsibilities associated with each individual job.

The central concept in time management is that of the written to-do list. The list should include all significant time demands and things that need to be accomplished. Some people try to keep their to-do list in their head. This is less reliable, and it makes setting priorities more difficult. The list should be expanded each time new items arise, and tasks should be deleted as soon as they are completed. A stack or pocketful of slips of paper with various undone tasks scribbled on them does not constitute a to-do list.

Whenever a list is made, each item should be given a priority. Lakein (1973) suggested an A-B-C priority system, with A corresponding to high-priority items and B and C corresponding to medium- and low-priority items, respectively. The A items can be further classified as A-1, A-2, A-3, and so on. However, making the list overly detailed and specific can be self-defeating. All A items should be completed before going on to B and C items. This is difficult at times, because the B and C items are more numerous and often easier to finish. This reflects a phenomenon referred to as the *80/20 rule:* "If all items are arranged in order of value, 80% of the value would come from only 20% of the items, while the remaining 20% of value would come from 80% of the items" (Lakein, 1973, p. 71). This means that in a list of 10 items, two of them will account for 80% of the productivity or value. These two items should be identified, labeled A, and completed as soon as possible.

The purpose of setting priorities is simply to ensure that the important items are identified and receive enough time. Most B and C items can wait. Completing the A items requires a schedule or time plan. In preparing the plan, one should take advantage of *internal prime time* and *external prime time* by scheduling *quiet time* and *availability time.* Internal prime time is the time when you concentrate the best and work the most productively; for some people this is before sunrise, whereas

for others it is late afternoon. External prime time represents the best opportunity to deal with other people, including coworkers, business associates, and social contacts. To accomplish the most within limited time, it is useful to set aside portions of one's internal prime time as quiet time. To do this, it is necessary to use whatever measures are available to minimize interruptions. Limiting phone calls, educating fellow workers about your time preferences, and closing an otherwise open office door can help to reduce interruptions.

A macro time manager is not a machine, and planning and time management should not become a source of distress. To the contrary, putting important items first should ensure that the high-value items are completed; this contributes to a greater sense of accomplishment. In addition, an important aspect of time management is putting time aside to relax. Effective use of time also permits one to "slow down" final decisions and reduces some of the pressure inherent in making major decisions at the last minute. The best time managers are not necessarily the ones who get the most things done.

OVERLOAD AVOIDANCE

Time management may reduce some of the stress from a demanding job, but there is a limit to what it can achieve if the demands on an individual are excessive. If preventive efforts at the organizational level have been effective, then overload should be minimized. Nevertheless, several avenues are open to the individual who is faced with excessive work obligations. Research has found that total workload varies by gender, age, occupational level, and number of children (Lundberg, Mardberg, & Frankenhaeuser, 1994). Specifically, women were found to have heavier total workloads than men, work stress peaked at ages 35 to 39, upper level managers had more control over their total workload, and total workload increased with an increase in number of children.

Because work overload triggers neuroendocrine and cardiovascular reactions that may have adverse health effects, managing one's total workload to avoid overload is desirable. This may be accomplished in a variety of specific ways, such as identifying and eliminating busy work to reduce total workload and learning to delegate when possible. Eliot (1995) proposed the following checklist for reducing or eliminating frustrating tasks:

1. Is it necessary to do this at all?
2. Is it necessary to do this task so frequently?
3. What would happen if this task was simply not done?
4. Is there an alternative?
5. Could someone else do it?

> Overload avoidance is an appropriate defensive strategy for keeping one's time and energy focused on the most important, joyful activities in life and work.

The checklist could also be applied to household chores. Balancing work and home demands can be a challenge, and using the checklist both at work and at home can help in avoiding overload.

Equally important is learning how to avoid excessive obligations in the first place. All too often employees are unwilling to negotiate a reasonable deadline or to redefine the scope of a task assigned to them by the boss. Management frequently has only a vague idea of the resources required to complete a specific project and a limited knowledge of the employee's actual workload. If the individual to whom the job is assigned does not negotiate a reasonable timetable at the outset or renegotiate the timetable when it appears unrealistic, then the individual falls victim to his or her own obligations.

Thus, overload avoidance involves learning to decline, whenever possible, those requests that are unreasonable or overwhelming and renegotiating those obligations that are no longer feasible. Although these sound like easy steps to take, experience has demonstrated that considerable skill may be required to control one's obligations in a demanding or insensitive environment.

SOCIAL SUPPORT

> Good, loving personal and professional relationships are among the most effective defenses against distress and offer deep sources of renewal and joy.

Work overload and high work demands are common characteristics of many organizational environments. Social support may be especially beneficial in the context of demanding and stressful jobs (Parkes, Mendham, & von Rabenau, 1994). Active social support may help a person in managing the personal work environment in at least two different ways. First, colleagues and coworkers may help a person develop perspective and understanding of persons or events that are experienced as stressful. Hence, through the dialogue in social support, the person is able to reframe how the stressor is experienced. Second, colleagues and coworkers may help provide the instrumental support of sharing demands that helps ease the stress load on the person. Although social support may be thought of as a personal matter, it is also influenced in the work setting by organizational factors. Fortunately, there are a number of strategies for encouraging social support with friends and coworkers.

Psychologists have suggested that we should have at least three friends or companions that we can count on when the going gets tough. Lyubomirsky (2007) provided several suggestions for those interested in creating positive friendships. First, show a genuine interest in other people and, where appropriate, provide encouragement. This can be best accomplished by creating recurring rituals. Get together with the person and share an activity that you both enjoy, such as having a meal, going on a hike, taking a drive, attending a religious service, or taking a

class together. In the words of Sallust (86–34 B.C.), "To like and dislike the same things, that is indeed true friendship." Second, engage in the rules of good communication: Make eye contact, listen, and acknowledge your friend's statement without feeling compelled to offer unsolicited advice (Lyubomirsky, 2007). It is about them, not you! Finally, be loyal and supportive in times of stress and adversity. Be willing to stick up for your friend, if appropriate, even if there can be a cost to you. Saki Hector Hugh Munro said this best when he noted, "The sacrifices of friendship were beautiful in her eyes as long as she was not asked to make them." In addition, social support from family and friends may incrementally aid one in managing workplace demands, and this may relate to the process of managing one's overall lifestyle.

Managing Lifestyle

Even when work demands do not take time away from family activities, work stress frequently spills over into the home as the working spouse brings the day's tensions into family interactions. Conversely, marital and other forms of family discord can readily lead to distraction or a quick temper at work (J. D. Quick, Henley, & Quick, 2004). At the same time, the family can serve an important role in countering and attenuating the amount of distress that organizational stressors induce. Thus, the family may be a help or a hindrance in confronting stress at work, depending on the nature of the marriage, the underlying personal priorities of the individuals, and the demands of the job. The emphasis throughout this book has been on preventive stress management in the workplace. Yet, there is an undeniably large interaction between work life and home life. The manner in which this interaction is handled may have an important bearing on an individual's overall well-being, influencing both health and work performance. There are two important aspects of the work–life and home–life interaction over which management may have some influence: the ongoing balance between work and home and the use of leisure time.

MAINTAINING A BALANCE

Some organizations reward employees for losing themselves in their work, which explains why it is not hard for some executives to lose their balance (Kofodimos, 1990). People who work long hours, put in extra time on weekends, and take work home may advance rapidly and appear to be succeeding marvelously. However, workaholic behavior eventually takes its toll. The workaholic remains chronically in a state

of distress. Often the person is unaware of his or her own signs of distress and may manifest the distress only through increased cigarette or alcohol consumption. This excessive involvement in work is really a form of addiction with potentially quite serious consequences. One approach to establishing a healthy balance between one's career and personal life involves moderating the drive for mastery while encouraging an executive's capacity for intimacy (Kofodimos, 1990).

Workaholics perceive more control over their lives when they are working (Eliot, 1995). Spending long hours at work may actually be an escape from responsibilities in the personal arena and from relationships. The danger in this strategy is that if one's life is dependent on the career, when the career is in trouble there are no other resources for satisfaction. In contrast to the distress of the workaholic lifestyle is the eustress, which is usually achieved by maintaining balance between work life and home life. Overinvestment in work activities frequently reflects an effort to gain rewards and a sense of value from work that are not coming from outside activities. Rather than working to make the outside activities more satisfying, the workaholic submerges himself or herself in his or her job, creating extreme imbalance in family life. Fredrickson's (2009) positivity ratio provides insights into how we can provide a proper work–family balance.

> Work and play are both essential ingredients of healthy, happy living, and balancing the two is an artful activity and not a mathematical calculation.

John Gottman is a widely read marriage counselor whose evidence-based research provides testimony to the power of the positive. Gottman's approach is to videotape married couples and observe how they interact. He then tracks them over time and evaluates their relationship, predicting with 91% accuracy that couples will stay together (Gottman & Silver, 1999). Consistent with the positivity ratio, happy relationships consistently have positive to negative affectivity ratios of 5 to 1. The positivity ratio appears to be relevant in business settings as well. Losada (Fredrickson & Losada, 2005) found that high-performance work teams had positivity ratios in the 6-to-1 range, whereas low-performance teams had ratios well below a 1-to-1 ratio. Individuals can adopt strategies that focus on increasing the number of positive feelings and behaviors, decreasing the number of negative feelings and behaviors, or a combination of increasing positive while decreasing negative feelings and behaviors. We conclude with a discussion of leisure time.

LEISURE TIME

One can assume and easily defend the notion that one virtue of leisure is stress reduction. A study of 1,929 informal caregivers found that reducing leisure led to emotional and physical stress and less life satisfaction (White-Means & Chang, 1994). Yet, little attention has been paid to the wise and creative use of leisure time as a stress management

tool. Vacations as one form of leisure are accepted as one of the rewards for working, and people often may express the need for a vacation. Although vacations may be stress reducing for some people in the right circumstances, for other people vacations may be stress provoking.

Although 1- or 2-week block vacations are one use of paid-time off, 3-day weekends and scattered "mental health" days are an alternative use of vacation and leisure time. For example, 3-day weekends can be great stress busters, although a 3-day weekend may have a different meaning for those who are on 4-day work weeks of 10-hour days. In any event, a well-planned 3-day weekend can be extremely refreshing, particularly during or following a period of extreme stress.

There is evidence that individuals have a greater tolerance for adversity and a decreased nervous system responsiveness following vacations. There is also some evidence that creative use of leisure time and attention to lifestyle can be as important as diet and exercise in preventing heart attacks (K. H. Cooper & Cooper, 2007). Thus, vacation planning should be considered as part of any personal stress management plan. However, it is important to recognize that vacations are not necessarily relaxing. The workaholic who tries to squeeze as much sightseeing or golf as possible into a week's vacation may return as stressed and as tired as before he or she left. Vacations may be physically tiring, but they should be planned in a way that makes them mentally relaxing.

The use of leisure time is important. Leisure means freedom from work and the demands and control of others. It is not the particular activity that is important, but the individual's attitude toward that activity. True leisure means doing something fulfilling without having to reach a goal. Some of us know how to work, but not how to play. One woman, when asked what she did in her leisure time, said she cleaned house. When asked if housework was really fulfilling and relaxing, she reflected and said that it really added to her stress.

Some people spend leisure time with pets. The companionship of pets has been shown to contribute to health by lowering blood pressure and heart rate, providing a sense of optimism and a feeling of control (Lynch, 2000). Human–animal bonds have been shown to alleviate a variety of illnesses and increase life expectancy. Playing frisbee with a dog or simply watching a cat relax may provide a different perspective on life. The unconditional positive regard provided by pets can serve as social support.